
Information at Work

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Making Friends with Confusion and Chaos

Why are we so afraid of confusion? Or uncertainty? Or chaos? As a project manager and group facilitator, I have feared these moments as much as anyone. When confusion occurred, I rushed in to sort things out. When people felt overwhelmed with information, I helped them cut it into chunks so they could deal with it piece by piece. And when, worst of all, chaos erupted, I used every skill I could muster to move us quickly back to solid ground.

But not any more. I have learned how confusion and chaos play an important role in moving things forward. I have learned that if I work with these troubling phenomena, rather than against them, new levels of order emerge. And most of all, I have learned that information is my key ally in creating order out of chaos.

This new understanding of information can dramatically alter the way one works. When I present these ideas to managers, they find they can validate these new concepts about chaos

and information with their own experiences. These ideas act as a new pair of glasses, allowing us to see the processes of order and change that have always occurred, but without our recognizing them.

In this first column I describe the process of self-organization, the creation of new order that can only happen after a temporary descent into confusion and chaos. Because of space limitations, I will not be able to illustrate how particular organizations benefit from trusting in confusion and chaos. In future columns, however, I will use the experiences of many companies and individuals to show how new ways of approaching and handling information are transforming the workplace.

Information Overload

The future search conferences that Marvin Weisbord describes in this newsletter are an example of how the descent into chaos can lead a group into new order. In these conferences,

*The visions that
result represent
more than
anyone thought
possible.*